

## **WHAT IS SIDS?**

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), often called “crib death”, refers to the sudden and unexpected death of an apparently healthy infant, whose death remains unexplained even after a complete post-mortem investigation, which includes an autopsy, an examination of the circumstances of the death and a review of the case history.

SIDS happens quietly and quickly, in any place, at any time. SIDS happens more commonly to infants less than six months of age.

In Connecticut 25 – 30 babies die from SIDS annually. Nationwide 2,500 – 3,000 babies die in the United States.

## **WHAT DOES THE AUTOPSY SHOW AS THE CAUSE OF DEATH?**

SIDS is reserved only for those deaths, which cannot be explained. An autopsy can answer the family’s questions about whether a baby’s death was due to SIDS or some known cause.

If the cause is known, by definition it cannot be called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

In Connecticut, the Medical Examiner and the Police are required by law to perform an autopsy and a scene investigation. In doing so, they may ask many questions and seem intrusive at the time. However,

these steps are necessary for an accurate diagnosis.

## **WHAT CAUSES SIDS?**

No one knows why a baby that seems well can die so suddenly and unexpectedly. Each year brings new theories about what causes SIDS but, as yet, no single theory has yielded the answer that will enable us to prevent this tragic death.

There is no evidence to show that SIDS is hereditary or contagious.

## **WAS THE BABY’S DEATH ANYONE’S FAULT?**

No one is at fault. Many parents blame themselves, or even each other at first, feeling that the cause was something they did, or failed to do.

SIDS cannot be predicted.

## **CAN ANYONE TELL WHICH INFANTS ARE AT RISK OF DYING OF SIDS?**

The vast majority of SIDS babies were well nourished, well cared for and in apparent good health prior to death.

Because medical research has been unable to pin down a cause of SIDS, there are as yet no definite tests that doctors can give to identify if a baby is at special risk.

Since we do not know of any particular condition that exists prior to death, there is yet no treatment or sure preventative measure which parents can take.

## **DID THE BABY SUFFER?**

Most of these babies appear to die undisturbed in their sleep. Usually no one is aware of the event at the time.

SIDS is not caused by suffocation or smothering.

## **WHAT IF OTHERS WERE CARING FOR THE BABY?**

Sometimes relatives, babysitters, or professional childcare providers were in charge of the baby when the death occurred.

Caregivers also feel grief as well as other children who are there when the death occurs.

## **CAN IT HAPPEN AGAIN IN THE SAME FAMILY?**

According to the best available information, there are no two SIDS deaths in a family.

Many parents have brought up healthy children both before and after their baby has died of SIDS.

## **HOW SHOULD THE BABY’S DEATH BE DISCUSSED WITH THE OTHER CHILDREN?**

Children should be told the truth – that their brother or sister died of SIDS and that only babies die of SIDS, not older children or adults. They also need to know the death is not anyone’s fault; no one is to blame. Children mostly need to be reassured of their parents’ continuing love and affection and of their own safety.

Children may not show their grief in the same way as adults. Parents and caretakers must look for signs of grief in the children. Please talk to your doctor if you have concerns about the child.

## **WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SIDS ON THE FAMILY?**

People grieve in many different ways. The grief affects parents, relatives, siblings, grandparents and caretakers. The most common feelings are depression, difficulty concentrating, anxiety, anger, denial etc. One may feel one or two symptoms or all of them. Most important is that one must look for support during this difficult time.

## **“BACK TO SLEEP”**

The National Institute of Child health and Human Development initiated the “Back to Sleep” campaign in 1994. Since then, nationwide there has been 40 percent reduction in SIDS rates.

## WHAT RESEARCH IS HAPPENING?

Medical research attempts to discover the cause of SIDS so that it may be eliminated, and to identify a baby who may be at special risk, so that some preventative approach may be applied to that particular baby. Specific areas of study include basic functions as heart rate and breathing. An additional area of research is in the field of metabolic enzyme disorders.

Probably SIDS will have more than one complete explanation.

We have many pieces of the puzzle. Now we must find their place in the total picture in order to understand and eventually prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.  
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## The local support contacts are:

Connecticut SIDS Alliance  
350 Webbs Hill Road  
Stamford, CT 06903  
866-574-7437  
E-Mail: [CTSIDS@aol.com](mailto:CTSIDS@aol.com)

[www.sids-network.org](http://www.sids-network.org)  
[www.sidsalliance.org](http://www.sidsalliance.org)  
[www.ctsids.org](http://www.ctsids.org)

State of Connecticut  
Department of Public Health  
Family Health Division  
410 Capitol Ave.  
Hartford, CT 06106

The national support contact is below:

The National SIDS Foundation  
10500 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 420  
Columbia, MD 21044  
800-221-7437

## FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SIDS

SIDS is the leading cause of infant death under one year of age.

SIDS cannot be predicted or prevented at this time.

SIDS is not caused by neglect or child abuse.

SIDS is not contagious or infectious.

SIDS is not caused by an immunization.

SIDS is not considered hereditary.

SIDS is not a new medical problem.

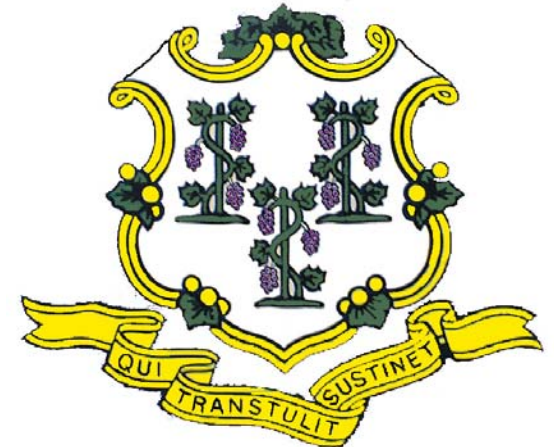
SIDS occurs rapidly and silently, usually during periods of sleep. The baby does not suffer.

SIDS occurs in families at all social and economic levels.

SIDS probably has more than one cause although the final death mechanisms appear to be similar.

SIDS is not anyone's fault.

## FACTS ABOUT SIDS



**Information for the families from the  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL  
EXAMINER**

**11 SHUTTLE ROAD  
FARMINGTON, CT 06032**  
(860) 679-3980  
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